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Solar Serve News

Dear friends,

We all want to be recognized as a person, company or country. For example Hoang Xuan Vinh, a Vietnamese athlete, won for the first time in the history of Vietnam, a gold medal at the Olympic games in Rio. He made the country proud and gave it more international recognition. Transformation can do the same. We have seen this in Danang. The city is now being recognized as a fast growing city with lots of potential. We as Solar Serve have been growing along with it and in this newsletter we'd love to tell you some of our latest stories.



One week together

Let's begin with a few stories we promised you in our last letter. We organized our Solar Serve staff outing with a gathering of friends in North Vietnam. Most of our staff travelled to Hanoi by sleeping bus for 750 km. The amazing gathering recharged our batteries and we even promoted our new products to our friends. After a few days we decided to travel to Haiphong to meet some of our deaf friends who have been working for Solar Serve. Very soon we were surrounded by many of their friends and had a good time. Some of them came along with us when we organized a boat trip in Halong bay and a visit to one of the breathtaking caves. Tired but satisfied we all flew back to Danang after one week. Again it was an amazing time!

Helping hands

Els and Nienke, two volunteers from Holland came to visit us and offered their help. But first they had to learn how to cook Vietnamese food. It was a real challenge for Tho, the wife of our director. They did well and in response they taught her how to bake her first Dutch pancakes. Later she changed it more Vietnamese with peanut oil and the pancakes became even more delicious. We also asked them if they could spend two days entertaining the children of our neighborhood with songs, games and stories about the sea, boats and fishing. It was amazing and the second day the children participated very well and took pride in their self-made decorations. Els and Nienke still had time to visit Hoi An and the next day they travelled back to Holland.



Recognitions

We were still hopeful that our clean cookstove could pass a second opinion test, when it failed the temperature surface test. It already passed major tests in Cambodia and Laos, but the last one needed to be reviewed. It took some time but finally our stove was approved and we received an official certificate. Now it can also be used for auction. It's nice that we can show our clean cookstove users an official paper. We were also contacted by the British Council. They wanted to write a book about successful social enterprises in Vietnam and asked us if they could mention us too. A great honor and recognition!

To be patient

A few months ago we were officially awarded by the Climate Innovation Center, a Vietnamese government agency. They confirmed that we were listed to be supported, but later they told us that we ended up in another category where support was not given. It was a setback for us and also for other social enterprises that have been working hard to present their case. We were awarded with great promises in front of the press but ended up with empty hands, while in other countries social enterprises are subsidized in order to benefit the local and sometimes poor people. It is a slow process to be recognized as a social enterprise and we need to be patient.



Longing for transformation

Mr. Tuan (39 yrs) lives in Kieng Giang (Mekong Delta) and is a very skilled carpenter. Although he is a good man, unfortunately he participated in illegal wood trade from Cambodia to his province. He thought it was a normal way to do business, because other companies were doing the same. When he attended our family business course he was very touched by the teaching of the Ten Commandments for Entrepreneurs. He decided to change his business according to what he had learned. So he carved the 10 Commandments in a piece of wood and hung it up at his workplace. He wanted to remind himself daily to follow these principles. Now he opened a new furniture factory and wants to use his skills in a more honest way to see a transformation in his business.

Leaving laughing people behind

Most of the people in Phi Lieng (Central Highlands near Dalat) could not sell their passion fruit on the market. Mr. Hien didn't give up and participated in one of our seminars. Other participants had their doubts and didn't pay attention when he introduced his model. But Hien wanted to create an opportunity in a difficult situation. So he decided to plant the passion fruit anyway, even when people were laughing about him. After his first harvest he only could sell the fruit for a low price. But when he marketed his products according to what he had learned, it changed. When the teachers of the course came to visit his business, he had already increased the price 4 times in a short time and was able to support his family. Now people are asking his advice and also see an impact in their daily lives.



New hope after being misused

Tai is a young man and got involved in crime. He was beaten down during a fight and when he woke up he found himself laying down in a hospital in China. They had operated on him and removed one of his kidneys without his permission. When he returned to Vietnam, he could no longer function properly. Desperate for a job he decided to find work in Malaysia, but they abused him as a modern slave. His passport was taken away, so he could not return back. He came in contact with a group of Vietnamese who had been in a similar situation but had found new hope. He joined our family business training organized by one of the leaders (see last letter). The teaching helped Tai on his return to Vietnam, and now he has opened a coffeshop in Danang for others in similar situations to give them new hope.



English subtitles

Now you can watch our new solar lamp video ([click](#)) with English subtitles on our YouTube channel. Because of security reasons (batteries are not allowed in planes), it is not possible to send this lamp by air. But we are still able to send it fast when we take the battery out. After that you can buy your own battery for around 10 USD in your own country. Our lamp is very durable. It does not have to stay outside in the sun for recharging, but only needs to be connected to a small solar panel which comes together with the lamp. The lamp can still be sent with a battery but only by sea mail, which can take two to three months before it arrives. Please contact us (see address below) for more info.

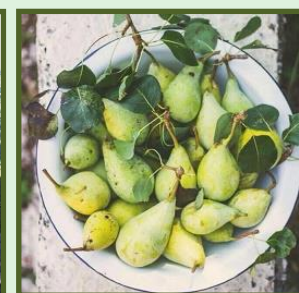


A great Asian country and city

This year Singapore has been very important for us as a port for transit to Malaysia and doing our Family Business Training. It also became a place for sharing, learning and growing together with many social enterprises during a two day conference on social entrepreneurship (Asian SE 2016) at the National University of Singapore. Almost two months later we were again in Singapore for the Impact Investing Conference (TBN Asia). The theme was: Fighting poverty through enterprise. Now we are working together with some people in Myanmar and also connected with other Asian entrepreneurs.

Helping others

Some people are sponsoring our work in different ways, like some Dutch people who were picking pears for several days. Others sold flower bulbs or organized a flea market and an exhibition of light during the Summer. More activities were planned. A young engaged couple fell in love with our dragonflies and ordered more than 100 of them for their wedding guests. A young man from Singapore came to our center and bought a number of Solar Lights for other people. And the last few months we were able to support 500 clean cookers to different locations in Vietnam. This is one of our missions as a charity organization but also as social enterprise.



Finally

We received the final drawings from the architect for building our new research center and it was officially sealed by the local authorities. We asked our former contractor to help building, but at the moment he has some other building projects. We were tempted to ask another contractor, but we felt that we should stick with the former one. He is very good in building strong foundations, which was a key requirement for us. We are now in the rainy season, so building at the moment will be more complicated. Therefore we asked the contractor to start building at the beginning of next year and he agreed. At least we are not in a hurry!

Greetings,

Solar Serve team

Called to Serve

More information: www.vietnamsolarserve.org/ or write to: solarserve@yahoo.com